

North Dakota, in South Dakota, in Texas, Louisiana, and other States. They are experiencing really very low numbers of unemployment because the jobs are plentiful. Our challenge is, just to comment briefly, on training the workforce we are going to need to fill all the jobs we have. These are very good-paying jobs, some starting at \$40,000 or \$60,000 a year—construction, welders—going up to \$125,000. Some are temporary, but many of them will be permanent.

So I hope we can resolve this unemployment issue, because, unfortunately, in Senator REED's State—the State of Rhode Island—and in 20 other States there is very high unemployment. In some States it might still be over 9 percent. They are chronically unemployed because of the competition of globalization and other factors. So I think we have to try to find a way to work together as a Nation. As I said, Louisiana is blessed to have relatively low unemployment, but we have a big job skills training gap we are working on in our State.

VETERANS AFFAIRS MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASE AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2013

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I want to actually talk a few minutes this evening about a very important bill the House just passed by an extraordinary vote of 346 to 1. My colleague, Congressman BOUSTANY in the House, was the lead sponsor, and I want to really congratulate him for his extraordinary work on this particular bill. It is something he and I have worked together on across party lines. He is a Republican and I am a Democrat, but we worked very closely together to get this entire bill passed not only for the benefit of Louisiana—which is shaded here on this chart as one of the States that would benefit—but we can see here how many other States between 2013 and 2017 will be affected positively by the passage of this bill.

The bill is the Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Lease Authorization Act. That is a mouthful, but it takes important action. It basically uses the guidance of the Office of Management and Budget—we received a letter from them at my request—and formulates a piece of legislation that will allow the Veterans Administration to build clinics the way they have been building clinics for our veterans—who really need the highest and best quality care—using a lease arrangement.

The reason we had to pass this bill—and I will be working with Senator VITTER and many others to ask unanimous consent at the proper time for this bill to pass through the Senate—is because about 6 years ago there was an administrative ruling that basically stopped the ability of the Veterans Affairs Department to be able to build these very needed veterans clinics by using a lease.

Internally, the administration just decided to score it differently. That threw lots of sand into the gears, and those gears have been stuck for 6 years. In our State, veterans in Lafayette and in Lake Charles have been waiting and waiting and waiting. We had some added complications, which the Veterans Administration has taken the blame for, in that the bid process that was used initially for one of our clinics was defective and they had to throw it out.

But the end of this sad story is that a great bill passed the House of Representatives, literally just a few hours ago, and I wanted to come to the floor to say how proud I am of Congressman BOUSTANY and his dogged pursuit of justice. The district of Congressman BOUSTANY is in the part of the State where these two clinics will be built, in Lafayette and Lake Charles, so I worked closely with him, as has Senator VITTER, to make sure we brought some clarity and focus to this issue in order to move forward. As the bill moved through to help us with our problem, it turns out it is also going to help many other States that are scheduled for veterans clinics.

I also want to thank Congressman MILLER of Florida, who is the chair of the VA committee. He worked very closely with Congressman BOUSTANY. Also I want to thank BERNIE SANDERS, our Senator from Vermont who chairs our committee here. Senator SANDERS—whose desk is right here, next to mine—has been very supportive of this effort. While I am not going to ask unanimous consent at this moment, he and I have had a discussion earlier today about how strongly he supports this effort and how much he wants to help us get this done.

There are 27 clinics in 22 States. This process—or nightmare, I should say—began in Louisiana about 6 years ago. Four years ago the ruling was made, but our legislation that was passed in the House will override that and basically set us on a course that is both fiscally responsible and so important to our veterans. We must honor the promises we made to them that we would provide clinics close enough so they could access them and so they are not driving hundreds of miles for regular care. We can be very smart in the way we design these leases so it will be a benefit to the taxpayer, a benefit to the veterans and it will really meet our obligation to them.

So again, the bill just passed the House, and tomorrow I will be asking unanimous consent, along with Senator VITTER, to move this bill, to get it to the President's desk and get it signed so that veterans who have been waiting—particularly in our State—for so long will have something extra special to celebrate this Christmas holiday.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMENDING SENATOR MURRAY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, a couple years ago I surprised everyone—but I didn't surprise myself—when I selected PATTY MURRAY as chair of the supercommittee. At the time Patty was chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, she was a member of the Budget Committee, and I thought she would do a remarkably good job because I had such faith in her integrity, her temperament, her wisdom, and her ability to get things done.

The country should be so pleased with the work she was able to do on a bipartisan basis with PAUL RYAN. It is really a kind of unconventional pair working together to come up with a budget that we can work on for 2 years. We have numbers now. I am very pleased that budget negotiators MURRAY and RYAN have come up with an agreement today that will roll back the painful arbitrary cuts of sequester and prevent another costly government shutdown. I again commend Budget Committee chairman PATTY MURRAY for making this possible. But it is also fair—and I hope this doesn't get him in trouble in the House—to say that Chairman RYAN also worked hard. It was a compromise. We didn't get what we wanted, they didn't get what they wanted, but that is what legislation is all about—working together. “Compromise” is not a bad word.

We believed all along that Congress should set sound fiscal policy through the regular order of the budget process and not through hostage-taking or crisis-making. We will have a lot more to say about this in the days to come, but this is a good day for our country.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed now to a period of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise today in recognition of International Human Rights Day. Sixty-five years ago, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which serves as a foundation for human rights initiatives internationally, and is an enduring guide for human rights advocates around the globe.

On this annual celebration of International Human Rights Day we all